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St. Mark 1:21-39:

## **“When the Word Speaks the Word”**

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St. Mark 1:21-39

Dear Friends in Christ,

David wrote, "In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there (Ps.37:10)." Concerning the words, *though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there*, Anthony Esolen, noted writer and social commentator, wrote:

"...It is the second clause (*his place...will not be there*) that expresses the greater dread, of a death beyond death. It is the terrible prospect of a total and unalterable severance - expressed as a loss of place. How should it be, if one were wiped clean from the memory of earth and heaven and all that dwell therein? (Anthony Esolen, "Nowhere Man," Touchstone, April 2009, p.19)

It's quite chilling, isn't it? "A death beyond death." A death in which awareness and knowing never end. As John wrote of the devil and all who walk in rejection, "they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev.20:10b)." That's echoed in the words of the rich man: "I am in anguish in these flames (Lk.16:24)."

Let's face it, for most, theology is largely based on four words: "I think; I feel." For most, if they believe in a god, the god is what the person thinks He is. That's called idolatry. We're here not to listen to what people think or feel but to listen to . . .

## WHEN THE WORD SPEAKS THE WORD

### I. At the Synagogue.

Many, if not most of you, know the first and fourteenth verses from the first chapter of St. John's Gospel. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..." That's Jesus. I'm taking us back to verses from last Sunday's Gospel from St Mark. "And they (the disciples) went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath (Jesus) entered the synagogue and was teaching (v.21)." No questions, no exploration of what they actually believed, or why. He already knew. As the 44<sup>th</sup> Psalm declares, "For he knows the secrets of the heart (v.21b)." Simply put, the Word speaks the Word.

"And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes (v.22)." He had authority. He did not make references to other sources. God in the flesh is the only authority and source. What He says is revealed to us in the greatest book - the Bible. They were only astonished. There was no connection with Scripture.

"And immediately there was in the synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - the Holy One of God (vv.23,24).'" A demon of hell identified Jesus but those in the synagogue who had Scripture could not.

How sad! Those gathered in the synagogue witnessed the demon's understanding of who Jesus is: *the Holy One of God*. They declared Jesus' teaching as "a new teaching with authority! (v.27b)." They declared, "He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him (v.27)." And we're told, "And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the region of Galilee (v.28)." Who else could He be but God in the flesh as prophesied in the Old Testament Scripture which was in front of their faces?!

This account reminds me of what has happened to most of the church. It claims to be Christian, but dresses Jesus in the garb of the thinking and wants of the day. It gladly changes who Jesus is so it can rid itself of that nasty word, "sin." Scripture is either twisted or ignored. Who would dare damage the trance-like worship of the day with such Scripture as, "Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him (1 Jn.2:15). Who would dare insist that "the

wages of sin is death... (Rm.6:23)?” Who would dare be so negative as to consider Jesus’ words, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me? (Jn.14:6).”

## II. Reality at Home

“And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee (v.28).” We’re then informed, “And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John (v.29).” Simon’s mother-in-law was ill. We’re told, “immediately they told him about her, and Jesus healed her.’ Her response, “...she began to serve them,” says a lot about her thankfulness for the Lord’s care. After that, everything cranks up: “That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door (vv.32,33).”

I wonder, have you ever noticed that, once again, the adverb “immediately” is repeated in the Scriptures for this morning - four times? “Immediately on the Sabbath he entered the Synagogue (v.21)” - “immediately there was in the synagogue a man with an unclean spirit (v.23)” - “immediately he left the synagogue (v.29)” - “immediately they told him about her (v30).” The Lord establishes our steps (Prov.16:9). He sets a time and when the time comes . . .

## III. “That Is Why I Came Out.”

“And rising very early in the morning while it was still dark, he departed and went to a desolate place, and there he prayed (v.35).” It was time needed to be alone with His Father. It was time needed for prayer. But it didn’t last long . . .

And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, “Everyone is looking for you.” And he said to them, “Let us go to the next towns that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.” And he went through all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons (vv.35-39).

That’s why Jesus walked the earth: to preach, to proclaim. He came for a very specific reason: to address humanities’ sin, and the dying and death and hell it brought into this world. Without the Word there’s no way out.

Christ’s preaching is rooted in the words, “...for in the day you eat of it you shall surely die (Gn.2:17).” *Surely die* because, as God said through Paul, “The wages of sin is death (Rm.6:23a).” And, as God said through Paul, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rm.3:23)”. We’re going to die - maybe from old age, maybe from disease, or an accident, or from violence or war. Even the creation dies because of mans’ sin, as Scriptures say, “For the creation was subjected to futility...(Rm.8:20).

It’s always there, isn’t it? The monstrous, crippling sin that causes hurt, guilt, regrets; horrible consequences; the wishing “I hadn’t done this or that. or said or thought this or that.”

I remember, many years ago, after being brought to faith in Christ and read David’s words, “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, **you only, have I sinned** and done what is evil in your sight (Ps.51:3,4a).” And, then, it hit and hit hard: *against you, you only, have I sinned!* I can’t play Adam and Eve in the Garden and blame my sin on somebody else or circumstances. The sin I commit is exclusively mine, in spite of people and circumstances. I did it! And then those shattering words “I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me (Ps.51:5).” I remembered Paul’s cry, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death (Rm.7:24).” How do I get out of this?! What am I going to do?

And David guided me: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Ps.52:17)." The only thing I can offer God is a heart broken by sin and guilt and their offense to God and the consequences it has caused others and me.

It was the Apostle Peter who said, "And he (Jesus) commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that (Jesus) is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sin through his name (Acts 10:42,43)."

I remember, many years ago, after being brought to faith in Christ, the horrible reality that the sin is still there. I didn't want to sin. I don't want to sin! I hate my sin. I've experienced any number of moments of great struggle, wondering why and how God could go on loving and forgiving me. The Lord directs us to the Word He gave Paul; to words that fit our walk through this fallen world:

"For I (the new person in Christ) delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members" (That's never an excuse for sinning. It's simply the truth!) - (Rm. 7:22,23).

And then, the Lord gave Paul the most precious Words for the struggles and guilt we experience: "There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rm.8:1)." That's what we receive when the Word - that is, the Scripture, the Sacraments - Jesus speaks to us. We are forgiven and not condemned!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott